# Lincoln Proclaims Thanksgiving Day

In 1863, a year filled with pivotal historical events — the Emancipation Proclamation, the Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg, and the Gettysburg Address, Abraham Lincoln issued what has become known as the first annual Thanksgiving Proclamation.

# Lincoln's Thanks

The year that is drawing towards its close, has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature, that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever watchful providence of Almighty God. In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign States to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere except in the theatre of military conflict; while that theatre has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union. Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defence, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle or the ship; the axe has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege and the battle-field; and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom. No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy. It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American People. I do

# ing Proclamation

therefore invite my fellow citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next, as a day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the Heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty Hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquillity and Union.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the Seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this Third day of October, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the Eighty-eighth.

Abraham Lincoln

By the President:
William H. Seward, Secretary of State.

*The original draft of the Thanksgiving Proclamation has never been found. It is likely that the original draft was written by Secretary of State William Seward for Lincoln.*

# Thanksgiving Day

The idea of a Thanksgiving Day was not new in American life when Lincoln issued his proclamation in 1863. Governor Bradford of Plymouth Colony declared such a day in 1621 and later years. President Washington proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving on two occasions and President Madison on one. Lincoln himself issued proclamations for national days of prayer to be celebrated in September, 1861, and April, 1862.

It was in 1863 that Lincoln established the precedent for holding Thanksgiving on the last Thursday in November, a tradition that survives today. Lincoln chose this date deliberately to follow the pattern of Washington's first Thanksgiving Day in 1789 and further emulated the first President by issuing his proclamation on the same date, October 3. Lincoln undoubtedly was influenced to proclaim a fixed annual Thanksgiving date by Sara Josepha Hale, editor of a lady's magazine, who had persuaded the governors of 20 states to celebrate Thanksgiving and sought a national observance. By calling for the same celebration at the same time in 1864, Lincoln established a fixed Thanksgiving date which became an annual event.

*"The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company was granted permission in 1905 to use Lincoln's name by the President's eldest son, Robert Todd Lincoln. Lincoln National Life has, since 1928, sponsored historical research and programs through the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. This brochure, produced by the library and museum staff, is made available to the public by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company and its local representatives."*

LINCOLN NATIONAL LIFE

THE LINCOLN NATIONAL LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
FORT WAYNE, INDIANA 46801

F-8905 10/76

71.2009.084.11147